

GENERAL NELSON A. MILES, OF U. S. ARMY, TELLS ABOUT LAST INDIAN UPRISING

The last general Indian trouble, that culminated in the battle of Wounded Knee and the slaughter of 200 of Big Foot's followers, men, women and children, and the death of thirty United States officers and men, which occurred December 29, 1890, not far from Pine Ridge Indian agency, and north of Rushville, Neb., some thirty good miles, closed forever Indian warfare so far as the State of Nebraska is concerned. About this incident many tales have been told and many stories written which contained much that was incorrect. Now after twenty-three years have passed General Nelson A. Miles, United States army, the old Indian fighter and plainsman, who has personal knowledge of the battle of Wounded Knee, brief history of the contest that is at variance with the tales told by many and what led up to it, as written by writers.

The general uprising of the Indians in 1890 extended over a large area and included various tribes of redmen and was brought about from various causes, largely, however, by the teachings of a "Messiah," a so-called half-breed, who claimed to be the Christ. His name was, he asserted, "Wovoka," son of Tavibo, or Waughzee-waughzee, who claimed to be a prophet who had had a vision. One year prior to the battle of Wounded Knee emissaries appeared among the tribes of the west, and sent by Wovoka, who told the Indians that they were to convene for a great conference at Pyramid Lake, Nev. In November of 1889, representatives of the different tribes left their reservations and traveled to the designated place in Nevada where the supposed Christ—the half breed—met and harangued them, telling them that he would soon drive from the country the paleface and bring back the vast herds of buffalo, deer, elk and other big game for the benefit of the Indians.

The Lake Meeting.

Of this great gathering of Indians, General Miles has written: "It is remarkable that by concerted action the delegations from the different tribes left their various reservations, some starting from points a thousand miles apart from others and some traveling fourteen hundred miles into a country unknown to them and in which they had never been before. The delegation from the Sioux Cheyenne and other tribes secretly leaving their reservations, met and traveled through the Arapahoe and Shoshone reservations in Wyoming, and thence via the Union Pacific railroad, passed into Utah and were there joined by the Gros Ventres, Utes, Snakes, Pie-gans, Bannocks, Pi-Utes and others until they came to a large conclave of whites and Indians near Pyramid lake in Nevada, where not less than sixteen of the principal tribes of Indians were represented. With simplicity yet reserved formality, the pretender appeared to them, surrounded by a few of his followers, all robed in white in a manner to impress the unsuspecting natives with a feeling of awe and profound veneration. The delegates were told that those present, were all believers in a new religion; that they were an oppressed people; that the whites and Indians were all the same, and that the Messiah had returned to them. So well was this deception played by men masquerading and impersonating the Christ that they made these superstitious savages believe that the so-called Christ could speak all languages, that the white, who were not of their faith, were to be destroyed, and that all who had faith in the 'new religion' would occupy the earth; that the Messiah would cover the earth with dust and would then 'renew everything as it used to be and make it better.' He told them also that all of their dead would be restored to life and come back to earth again; that in 1890, He would move east, driving before Him vast herds of wild horses, buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, and convert the earth into a happy bounding ground, an ideal Indian heaven; and they must so inform all the people they met. He said that those remaining on earth were to be all good hereafter and they must all be friendly to one another; that in the fall of the year (1890) the youth of all the good people would be renewed so that nobody would be more than 40 years old and after that time the youth of every one would be renewed in the spring and that they would also live forever! That if any man disobeyed, his tribe would be wiped from the face of the earth; that he would know their thoughts and actions wherever they might be.

Song Indians Chanted.

Indian delegates who saw the so-called Messiah described him in different ways: some as an Indian, others as a white man. There were undoubtedly several masquerading in the same robes and disguised as one person. They stated that the Messiah taught them various religious ceremonies and incantations, and a sacred dance, and to chant weird and solemn music as:

"My father has much pity for us
My father has much pity for us.
I hold out my hands toward him and cry.

I hold out my hands toward him and cry.

The father says this as he comes,
The father says this as he comes,
You shall live, he says, as he comes.
You shall live, he says, as he comes.

"They were to wear a light garment like a hunter's frock which, after being sanctified, was believed to be bullet-proof.

"These ceremonies lasted sometimes for four or five days and the warriors were fully initiated in the mysteries of the new faith as taught by the so-called Messiah.

"These men all returned to their various reservations proclaiming the glad tidings that the Messiah had returned to earth and they had met him face to face; they announced to their relatives and friends what they had learned, fully convinced themselves and convincing others that what they had seen and heard was true. Nothing could so thrill the very souls of an oppressed people as these glad tidings from the Messiah, brought to them by their own trusted messengers. These relations were received by the Indian tribes with unspeakable joy and thanksgiving, with the wildest demonstrations they manifested their gratitude to the great spirit.

Sitting Bull Convinced.

"When this doctrine reached the waiting tribes of Indians on the return of their emissaries, such persistent enemies of the white race as Sitting Bull and other hostile war chiefs immediately prepared not only to carry out the designs of the so-called Messiah, but to assemble large bodies of Indians and move toward the setting sun to welcome him in his triumphant march of devastation across the continent. Sitting Bull, the great war chief and head center of all the different tribes in the northwest and even into Canada, notifying them of the design for a general uprising of all Indian tribes and calling up them to assemble in the Bad Lands of South Dakota, known as the 'Mauvais Terres.' That district of country was an ideal Indian stronghold more than 100 square miles in area, the roughest, most precipitous and inaccessible of any on the continent, the object being to make that the general rendezvous for all the hostile Indians of the great northwest country. This was to be followed by a righteous crusade over the country moving toward the setting sun, devastating the scattered settlements and opening the way for the coming of the Messiah as he moved east in accordance with his promise. The conspiracy had spread over a vast extent of country and the most serious Indian war of our history was imminent. In fact, the peace of an area of country equal to an empire was in peril. The states of Nebraska, the two Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada were liable to be overrun by a hungry, wild horde of savages. The Indians would have, in what they believed to be a righteous crusade, looted the scattered homes and lived and traveled upon the domestic stock of the settlers. Pillage would have been followed by rapine and devastation."

The general dissatisfaction among the Indians was primarily caused by the manner in which the government and disregarded their interests and caused them to become hostile to the whites. Boiled down the general uprising, says General Miles, was brought about by three main reasons:

"First—Insufficient food resulting from failure of the government to fulfill its treaty obligations."

"Second—Utter failure of the Indian crops for that and the preceding year.

"Third—Religious fanaticism and false prophecies engendered by designing white men and the delusions of a man pretending to be a messiah."

Starvation and Sorrow.

Continuing General Miles says: "The religious excitement, aggravated by almost starvation, was bearing fruit. The Indians said they had better die fighting, than die a slow death from starvation. They had traded almost everything they had for arms and ammunition."

In November, 1890, hostilities were assumed by more than 3,000 Indians leaving their reservation, destroying their habitations and agricultural implements, and moving to the Bad Lands of South Dakota preparatory to the assembling of all the hostile Indians and a general crusade against the white settlements. To counteract this movement a strong cordon of troops was thrown around the Bad Lands to hold the hostiles in check and prevent reinforcements reaching them, as it was the design of General Miles to anticipate the movements of the Indians and arrest or overpower them in detail before they had time to concentrate in one large body; and it was deemed advisable to secure, if possible, the principal leaders and organizers and remove them for a time from that country. This was successfully accomplished. To this end authority was given November 25, 1890, to William F. Cody, (Buffalo Bill), a reliable and experienced chief of scouts, to go to Sitting Bull's camp and induce him to come in. If not successful in this, to arrest and remove him to the nearest military sta-

tion. He was authorized to take a few trusted men with him for that purpose. His mission was suspected or made known to friends of Sitting Bull who prevented the arrest.

Regarding the killing of Sitting Bull General Miles writes: "The first measure for the arrest of Sitting Bull having failed, orders were given on December 10, 1890, directing Colonel Drum, the commanding officer, Fort Yates, to make it his personal duty to secure the arrest of Sitting Bull without delay. He directed certain troops of his command under Captain Fehet to make a night march of thirty-five miles to Sitting Bull's camp, and the remainder of the troops to be held in readiness for service.

Death of Sitting Bull.

"The Indian agent selected a body of police composed of Indians in whom he had confidence, who were ordered to the camp of Sitting Bull to make the arrest, to be followed and supported by the troops under Captain Fehet. Had Sitting Bull submitted to the arrest he would have been unharmed and probably alive today. Although urged to submit quietly by the men of his race, clothed with authority of the government, acting as police, he resisted and made a determined effort to avoid going with them, raised a cry of revolt which gathered around him a strong force of his warriors; these opened fire upon the police and a desperate fight ensued in which Sitting Bull and seven of his warriors were killed and many wounded; not, however, without serious loss to the brave Indian policemen."

The government continued in its effort to persuade the Indians that they should return to their reservations and gradually a better feeling was manifest among the redmen and many of them were ready to go home. Says General Miles:

"While the hostile Indians were held in the Bad Lands by a strong body of troops, every effort was made to create diversion in the camp, dissuade them from their religious fanaticism and induce them to return to their allegiance to the government. At the same time the Indians were notified that if they complied with the orders of the military, their rights and interests would be protected.

"The measures taken were having a most desirable effect upon the hostiles, for it was reported in their camp that Sitting Bull and his immediate following had been killed; that Big Foot had been arrested, and that Hump had returned to his allegiance. This discouraged them and with the presence of a strong cordon of troops gradually forcing them back to the agency, and the strong influence brought to bear through the aid of friendly Indians from Pine Ridge, caused them to break camp on December 27, 1890, leave their stronghold and move toward the agency by slow marches.

"The troops under Colonel Carr and Lieutenant Colonels Olfley and Sanford were slowly following in communicating and supporting distances.

"Although the camp of Big Foot had escaped the troops on the Cheyenne river, the troops on the south were moved so as to prevent them joining the hostile element, and orders were given to the troops under Colonel Carr and General Brooks, but only to intercept the movement of Big Foot and his band, but to cause their arrest. On the 28th day of December, 1890, Lieutenant Colonel Whitside met Big Foot one and one-half miles west of Porcupine creek and demanded his surrender. The band submitted without resistance and moved with the troops seven miles, where they were directed to camp, which they did in position as the commanding officer directed. Reinforcements of troops arrived and there were 470 fighting men as against 106 warriors then present in Big Foot's band.

Wounded Knee Battle.

"The unfortunate affair at Wounded Knee the following day, December 29, in which thirty officers and soldiers and 200 Indians (men, women and children) were killed or mortally wounded, prolonged the campaign and made a successful termination more difficult.

"A number of the Indians that had remained peaceable at the Pine Ridge agency became greatly alarmed on learning what had befallen the band of Big Foot, and some of the young warriors went to their assistance. These, on returning with the intelligence of what had occurred, caused a general alarm which resulted in over 3,000 leaving the camps located about the agency to join hostilities and assume a threatening attitude.

"The Indians from the Bad Lands, under Short Bull and Kicking Bear, would have camped that night of December 29 within four miles of the agency, but on hearing the news of the Big Foot disaster, turned back and reassumed a hostile attitude on White Clay creek, about seventeen miles from the Pine Ridge agency. Thus, instead of camping within a short distance from the agency the next day, December 30, found the hostile camp augmented by nearly 4,000 additional Indians."

December 30, a small band of Indians burned a building at the Catholic mission four miles out from Pine Ridge and were chastised by the soldiers under Colonel Forsyth. This affair and the Wounded Knee battle seriously complicated matters and made it more difficult to suppress hostilities. Write General Miles: "On December 30, 1890, the wagon train of the Ninth cavalry was attacked by Indians and repulsed by the troops

guarding it. On January 3, 1891, attack was made upon Captain Kerr's troop of the Sixth cavalry, then in position between Colonel Carr and Lieutenant Colonel Olfley, and quickly and handsomely repulsed by that officer and his troop, aided by the prompt support of Major Tupper's battalion, followed by Colonel Carr. These repulses had a tendency to check the westward movements of the Indians and hold them in position along the White Clay creek until their intense animosity had to some extent subsided."

Realizing the importance of restoring confidence to those who were not entirely disposed to assume hostilities, General Miles assumed the immediate command of the troops encircling the hostile camp and took station at Pine Ridge, where, with his staff officers, General Maus, Baldwin, Humphreys and Major Cleman, he would not only communicate with the camp, but exercise a general supervision over all the commands.

The Final Surrender.

The actual surrender of the Indians is thus described by General Miles: "Under the circumstances, with the assurance of good faith at the agencies and from the government and held by a strong cordon of troops encircling them, on January 15, 1891, the Indians moved up White Clay creek and encamped within easy range of the guns of the large command at Pine Ridge; the troops under General Brooks following immediately behind them, almost pushing them out of their camps. On the following day they moved further in and encamped under the guns of the command and surrendered their entire camp of 4,000 Indians, the remainder moving directly to the places of abode they had formerly abandoned. The troops were moved into three strong camps of easy communication, occupying the three points of a triangle, with the Indian camp in the center in close proximity to the troops.

"While in this position they surrendered nearly 2,000 rifles and complied with every order given them. Sufficient arms had been surrendered to show their good faith; these arms, together with what had been taken at other places, aggregated in all between 600 and 700 rifles. As an additional guaranty of good faith, the division commander required the persons of Kicking Bear and Short Bull, the two first principal leaders of the hostiles, and twenty other warriors of the same class. These men volunteered to go as hostages for the good faith of their people and as an earnest desire of their disposition to maintain peace in the future. They were placed in wagons and sent twenty-six miles to the railroad and thence by rail to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, there to remain until such time as it might be necessary to guarantee a permanent peace.

"Thus ended what, at one time threatened to be the most serious Indian war, and the frontier was again assured of peace and safety from the Indians who, a few weeks prior, had been a terror to all persons living in that sparsely populated country.

Due Credit Given Troops.

"Too much credit cannot be given the troops who endured the hardships and sustained the honor, character and integrity of the government, risking their lives in the effort to restore peace and tranquility, placing themselves between a most formidable body of savages and the unprotected settlements of the frontier in such a way as to avoid the loss of a single life of any of the settlers, and establishing peace in that country with the least possible delay. In fact, the time consumed in solving this most difficult problem was remarkably brief, it being but fourteen days from the time Sitting Bull was arrested to the time the Indians were moving in to surrender, and would have encamped within four miles of the agency, had not the disaster of Wounded Knee occurred. Notwithstanding this unfortunate affair, the time occupied was only thirty-two days from the time of the arrest of Sitting Bull until the whole camp of Indians surrendered at Pine Ridge, South Dakota."

The battle of Wounded Knee was caused by a young Indian becoming excited and firing off a gun. A moment later the Indian camp was a bedlam and the slaughter was on in full force. No one was expecting trouble and army officers and soldiers were walking about the Indian camp when the shooting began.

"There is no doubt but what many of the soldiers were killed by their comrades in the terrific cross-fire that swept the camp," says Thomas H. Tibbles, of Omaha, who saw the battle. He criticizes the manner in which the troops were placed about the Indian camp leaving the camp in a circle of troops so stationed that when they fired, their bullets, of necessity, must have entered the ranks of other soldiers. Mr. Tibbles says the Indians had but a few old-fashioned guns, most of which had been surrendered when the battle started; that they shot perhaps a few soldiers, but not many, and then only in self defense, the whole camp running for a deep ditch as soon as the shooting began. "It is a deplorable thing," says Mr. Tibbles, "but perhaps unavoidable. The scene following the battle was sickening and never will be effaced from my memory. I was there as a newspaper representative and saw it all—the last battle, if such it can be called, that ever will take place between Indians and whites—at least in the state of Nebraska."